

Mindfulness of Breathing 1

by Thich Nhat Hanh

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Today is the twenty-fourth of July, 1998. We are in the New Hamlet. The children who have just arrived are invited to draw waves and water on a sheet of paper. We did it the first week, and I received lots of drawings from the children. Maybe it would be easier to draw waves—it's more complicated to draw water. It's wonderful to be a wave, because it goes up and it goes down. It's beautiful; but sometimes it's tiring, especially when the waves are angry or excited. Sometimes we need to be water, calm water, tranquil water. Of course, the waves are water, but the waves are not really calm. But water can become calm and tranquil, because water can calm itself. We cannot separate the waves from the water. If we remove water, then there will be no waves, and if we remove the waves, there will be no water. The two are inseparable, but there is a difference between the water and the waves, because the water can be calm.

We are like waves and water: sometimes we are excited, we are noisy, we are agitated. Sometimes we need to be calm, to be tranquil; and it is possible to be calm and tranquil. Without wind, the water can become very calm. Have you seen calm water? Of course you have. When water is really calm and tranquil, it reflects the blue sky, the clouds, the trees, and you can even take a picture of the sky by focussing on the water. Everything that you see in the water, when the water is very calm, is all reflected. We are like water, and sometimes we become waves. We have a need to become tranquil water.

In Plum Village we learn to be like calm water, and if you succeed you can do the same thing at home and at school. Sometimes at home and at school we are tired, we are agitated, we are miserable, and we have the need to transform into tranquil water. I'm going to tell you how to practice it. First of all, you need to have tranquility in you. It's something easy. If the water can be calm, then you can be calm, too. We have to confirm that water can be waves and that water can be tranquil. We are like that, we can be excited, but we can also become very calm like water. So, calmness is in us, as it is in water. We cannot remove the tranquility from the water. The calmness exists in water, and it is the same thing for us. We have calmness in us, but we need to know how to make it manifest.

This is a small bell—we call it the mini-bell. I'm going to tell you how to invite a bell to sound, with a small instrument like this, made of wood. The tranquility in us, the peace in us, we have to call them. There's tranquility and calmness and peace and joy in us, but we have to call them so that they can manifest themselves. This tranquility, that love, that joy, that stability, sometimes we call them Buddhahood, or the nature of Buddha in us. The Buddha is someone who is very calm, very tranquil. The Buddha is somebody who has joy, compassion and calmness, and the Buddha is not somebody made of materials like wood or gold. When we invite the bell, it's one of the means to call the joy in us, the tranquility in us, so that we can awaken the Buddha in us. There is a baby Buddha in each of us, and we have to be aware of it. In a practice center like Plum Village, when we invite the bell to sound, we have a chance to touch the Buddha in us, we have a chance to call the nature of Buddha in us, so it can manifest itself. If we do it correctly, peace will be there in our hearts, and we will immediately become calm water, and we will reflect reality as it is. If we are not calm, the image we reflect will be a distorted image, and when the image is distorted by our minds, the image is not the reality, and it causes lots of suffering. So we have to call tranquility, to invite it to manifest itself. When I invite the bell to sound, it is because the bell is considered as a friend, someone

who helps us to come back to ourselves, become calm. That is why, when I start inviting the bell to sound, I have to pay respect to the bell like this (Thay bows), exactly as we do to our friend. We pay our respect and love to our friend, so I pay respect to the bell: I join my palms, I make a lotus flower or a tulip, and I offer this flower to my bell, to my friend. Then I take my bell and put it on the palm of my hand, lift it to the level of my eyes, and look at it, and I breathe. We have to practice to do it.

I started inviting the bell when I was sixteen years old, because at that age I became a novice monk. If you visit my hut in the Upper Hamlet, you can see my picture when I was sixteen years old, the picture of a baby monk. When I hold the bell in my hand, like this, I start breathing in and breathing out. Breathing in, I calm myself, and breathing out I smile. My hand becomes a flower, like a lotus, and the bell becomes a diamond, a jewel in the heart of the lotus. Have you heard the mantra "Om mani padme hum?" It is in Sanskrit, and it means, "Oh, the jewel in the lotus flower!" When you breathe like that, very deeply in mindfulness, with calmness, you become the lotus flower, because there is mindfulness in you that gleams like a jewel. It is a practice, it is not a prayer. Look at my hand, it

because there is mindfulness in you that gleams like a jewel. It is a practice, it is not a prayer. Look at my hand, it looks like a lotus flower with five petals, and in its heart there is a jewel. I breathe in with that image, and then I become a lotus flower with a jewel in me. There's a short poem that you should learn by heart, if you want to invite the bell to sound:

Body, speech and mind in perfect oneness,
I send my heart along with the sound of this bell.
May all the hearers awaken from forgetfulness,
And transcend the path of anxiety and sorrow.

This poem is in French, in German, in English, in Vietnamese, so if you really want to practice inviting the bell, you have to know it by heart. This poem has only four lines.

What do we do when we look at the bell like this? We breathe, and breathing in, we recite the first line of the poem, and breathing out, we recite the second line of the poem, and so on. When we finish the poem, we become very calm, very tranquil, and we can start inviting the bell to sound. We do it like this (light sound of bell). This is not a full sound that I made, it's only a half-sound, to wake the bell. We do it like this...we hold the stick, the inviter, in vertical position like this, and we touch the bell to announce to people that a real sound will be sounded, so please get ready to receive the real sound. We prepare the sound, we don't want the people around us to be surprised when they hear the real sound. The purpose is to awaken the bell, and to let people know that a real sound will be invited, so that everybody can stop talking and thinking, and everybody will be ready to listen to the bell. The sound of the bell is considered to be the voice of the Buddha inside us, calling us back. That's why in Plum Village, when we hear the sound of the bell, we stop talking, we stop working, we stop our conversations, and we get ready to receive the real sound of the bell. The sound of the bell is the voice of the Buddha in us, which calls us back to ourselves. We need to get ready to listen to that sound. You give people time, so that they can get ready: you give about eight or nine seconds before you invite the real sound. I'm going to do it, and when you hear the sound of the bell you can breathe a long in-breath and a long out-breath.

(Bell)

That's it. When you breathe in, you say : "Listen...I listen." And breathing out, you say silently: "This sound brings me back to my true home." My true home is the home of joy and peace, the home of compassion, so remember the second poem of two lines: "Listen, listen," for my in-breath, and for my out-breath, "This wonderful sound brings me back to my true home." You do it like this three times before inviting the bell to sound again. We need nine conscious breaths--breathing in, breathing out, in, out, in, out, three times--and then you invite one more sound of the bell, and then three in-breaths and out-breaths, and then you invite a third sound of the bell. So in total you practice nine in-breaths and out-breaths.

In Plum Village before eating, we practice like this: we invite the bell to sound three times, and then we have the opportunity to breathe in and out nine times, so the water in us becomes calm and tranquil, and so we can touch the peace of the Buddha in us. Every time we start a Dharma talk or a Dharma discussion, we always start with three sounds of the bell. You have noticed it. I hope that when you go home you can continue this practice, but you need a bell, a mini-bell, to practice it. Now, can I invite you all to practice breathing with the sound of the bell with me? Please sit straight, in a solid position, and we're going to practice together, listening to three sounds of the bell. Breathing in, "Listen, listen." Breathing out, "This wonderful sound brings me back to my true home." I look at the bell, I practice conscious breathing, I awaken the bell, and I invite the bell to sound:

(Bell)

A second time:

(Bell)

A third time:

(Bell)

I have invited three sounds of the bell. I have made nine in-breaths and nine out-breaths, and then I put back my bell like this. I put the stick back, and with my two hands I put the bell on the table, and I pay respect to it. Today you are going to practice inviting the bell together, and I hope you can practice inviting the bell at home.

I think that in a modern house, in the twenty-first century, we need a special room in our house so that we can practice tranquility and peace. We live in a civilized society, so we need to arrange our house in such a way that we have a room in which we can practice peace, to restore peace and reconciliation. We reconcile with ourselves, and we reconcile with the other members of our family. We live in peace and harmony with the others, so we need a

room where we can restore joy and peace in ourselves. In our daily lives it is easy to lose our calmness, and to make the others suffer, and to make ourselves suffer. We can call this room the meditation room, or the breathing room. This room can be a small room. We don't need tables or chairs; we just need a bell and some cushions to sit on comfortably. You can ask your mom and your dad to arrange that room. We need a room like that in our house. Each civilized house should have a room like that. We have rooms for our guests, we have rooms for playing, to watch TV, living rooms--we have all kinds of rooms, but we need a room where we can restore our tranquility and peace.

I hope that the young people can help their parents to realize this project, so you have a breathing room at home, in order to take care of your nervous system, your calmness, your tranquility. I would like to have a vase in that room, with a flower. You can arrange that flower yourself, and that flower is the symbol of the Buddha within us. If you have a statue of the Buddha that you like, you can put it in that room, but if the statue is not beautiful, you shouldn't put it in that room. It's better to put a flower instead. And every time you feel that peace is not in you, every time you feel agitated or angry, you can go immediately to that room, mindfully. Instead of discussing, talking or crying, instead of disputing, we stop everything. We walk mindfully to that room, and we breathe. Breathing in, we make a step, and breathing out, we make another step, and when we get to that room with mindfulness, we open the door and we come in we close the door very calmly, and then we pay respect to the flower. We sit down on a cushion, and we start practicing inviting the bell. I guarantee you that, after practicing inviting the bell three times, you will have peace, calmness, and tranquility in you. I think that your daddy and mommy will practice the same thing: every time that they are not calm, or they are agitated or angry, they know what to do. They stop everything, and they go to the breathing room, and they stay there with their conscious breathing for ten minutes, to restore peace. It's a very civilized act, and I hope that you can arrange it in every home.

So, I have asked you to do many things: first, to draw a wave, and then water; I know that drawing water is difficult, but many children have succeeded in doing it. Then, you can learn by heart the first and the second poems, so you can practice inviting the bell. I'm going to lend you this bell, and this stick, so when you hear the small sound of the bell, you can stand up, pay respects to the Sangha, and go out to continue with your practice.

(Bell)

My dear friends, yesterday I spoke about the first exercise proposed by the Buddha concerning mindful breathing: "Breathing in, I am aware that I am breathing in; breathing out, I am aware that I am breathing out." To recognize breathing is the first exercise. There are four exercises about mindful breathing concerning the body. We should always start with our physical bodies, because our physical bodies also needs peace, harmony and rest. In order for our mind to be concentrated, and also for our minds to be in peace and harmony, walking meditation, sitting meditation, and deep relaxation are exercises that concern our physical bodies. We should realize a true rest. We have lost our capacity to really rest our bodies. That is why we all need vacations to rest, but to rest is an art. Many among us know how to rest, but some others don't know how to rest. Our bodies need rest in order to heal. There are wounds in our bodies, as in our minds, and rest is necessary. The practice of mindful breathing allows us to realize this rest.

Animals in the forest, every time they are wounded, know how to rest. They look for a very quiet place, and they just stay there, without moving, for many days. They know it's the best way for their bodies to heal. During this time they don't even think to eat or to run after prey. This wisdom is still alive in animals, but we human beings have lost the capacity to rest. We know we need vacations, we need rest, but we don't know how to use the time that is given to us. Sometimes, after a vacation, we are more tired than if we didn't have the vacation. So we have to learn how to rest. Deep relaxation here is one of the methods of resting. Walking meditation is also a method. Sitting meditation is another means to rest. In order to rest, you have to know how to use your breathing. The first exercise the first exercise that the Buddha proposed is "While I am breathing in, I am aware that this is breathing in; and I breathe out, and I am aware that I am breathing out." Recognizing breathing in as breathing in, and breathing out as breathing out.

The second exercise: "I breathe in, and I am aware of the length of my in-breath; breathing out, I am aware of the length of my out-breath." During the second exercise, we are aware of the length of the in-breath and the out-breath. That means that we are aware only of breathing in and breathing out. If your in-breath is long like this...you are aware of the in-breath all during the length of the in-breath. That doesn't mean that a long in-breath is better than a short in-breath. What is important here is mindfulness. It is not the length of breathing in or breathing out. If the in-breath is long, you know it. If the out-breath is long, you know it, that is all. Do not try to prolong the breath; just allow it to be the way it is, naturally. If it's short, let it be short. You only need to light the light of mindfulness to recognize what is going on at that moment. In this case it is a long in-breath, in that case it is an in-breath of another length. Light up the light of mindfulness, in order to recognize that this is an in-breath and it is quite a long in-breath. During practice you touch deeply your in-breath and your out-breath, and you stop thoughts. We should not interfere with the length of the breath, only being aware of what is going on.

So, during the first exercise, breathing in, breathing out; during the second, long and short. During the second exercise we are aware of the length of the in-breath or the out-breath. With the third, I breathe in and I am aware of my whole body. That means while you breathe like this, you generate energy of mindfulness, and with the energy of

my whole body. That means while you breathe like this, you generate energy of mindfulness, and with the energy of mindfulness you embrace your whole body. You recognize your whole body being present here, either sitting, lying down, standing, or walking. Breathing is to generate the object of mindfulness. The object of mindfulness here is the whole body. You know that in the first exercise the object of mindfulness is in-breath, out-breath. In the second exercise, the object is length of the breath; in the third, it is to embrace, to contact, to touch something that is more than the breath, the physical body. The physical body is the foundation of the breath. So you start with pure breathing, and you arrive at your physical body. Breathing in, I am aware of my whole physical body; breathing out, I am aware of my whole physical body. That way, we start to recognize our whole physical body, we embrace it, and we are at peace with it. "Breathing in, I am aware of my whole body." This seems to be very simple, but it is extremely important. We started to come back to the breath, and after becoming one with our in-breath, now we are becoming one with our physical body. This is returning, coming back. We wandered a lot in the past, but now we are determined to come back to ourselves. The first destination is the breath, and then it is the body, and later the feelings, the perceptions, and consciousness, knowledge.

Take another step in order to come back to yourself as a physical body: "Breathing in, I am aware of my whole physical body." This is already a love meditation. We have to be very interested in our physical body. "I recognize you, my physical body. I have abandoned you too much, but now I'm coming back, and I recognize you as existing."

Number four: "Breathing in, I calm the activities of my physical body." Because there has not been enough peace in your physical body, not enough harmony, there are wars in your physical body, sorrow, or pain; so you should be here for your physical body. "My physical body, I am here for you." Take care, be interested in your physical body, and start to take care of your physical body. "I breathe in, and I calm my physical body. When in a lying position, practicing deep relaxation, you can realize rest and recovering of your physical body. You have room in your home where you can practice deep relaxation every day. You can practice this as a family. One member of the family can guide the practice of deep relaxation. Here in Plum Village the brothers and the sisters can show you how to practice deep and complete relaxation. You have to learn that very carefully, in order to do it when you get back home. Also you can teach that to the children. We can practice this as a family, a family is a Sangha. One member of the family can guide the practice of relaxation. During fifteen or twenty minutes, we can re-establish our mindfulness, we can dissipate stress. It is very important to practice as a group, as a Sangha, as a family, and this will create a good habit among your children.

The third exercise is recognizing the presence of your physical body. The fourth exercise is to calm the activities of your physical body, being aware of your physical body as a whole, and then being aware of different parts of your physical body.

The next four exercises are about feelings, but today we will speak only about the first set of four exercises. In the *Satipatthana Sutra*, the *Discourse on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness*, the Buddha said, "Like a farmer who goes into the attic and brings down a bag of grain, and opens it and lets all the seeds fall out onto the floor, and with his good eyes he can distinguish wheat from beans etc., when you generate mindfulness, with this mindfulness, you can identify different parts of your body. "I breathe in, I am aware of my eyes; I breathe out, and I smile to my eyes." This is because your eyes are part of your physical body, and you can start with your eyes. Then you go down to the nose, the mouth. You are aware of your brain, of your ears, and you should call the different parts of your physical body by their names, and send to each part of your body your smile. Your smile, in mindfulness, is the energy of love. Your awareness is first, and love comes with it. You have to take care of your physical body, that 's what the Buddha said. In the sitting position, or lying down, you can start generating mindfulness, and you send this energy to different parts of your body. " I breathe in and I am aware of my eyes; I breathe out, and I smile to my eyes." Recognize your eyes as existing, and send to your eyes the energy of your awareness. You can start with your eyes, and you can finish with your feet.

There are about thirty-six parts of the body that are discussed in this discourse of the Buddha. So always with mindfulness of breathing, you embrace the different parts of your body. When one part of your body is not well, when there is pain, when something is not going well in one part of your body, you should stop, you should tenderly embrace this part of your body with mindfulness. You should send energy and love, and this will help this part of your body to heal. The ideal position in which to do it is to lie down. If your child needs this, you can become your child's guide in order to practice this. I will practice with you, my daughter; I will join my mindfulness energy with yours, in order for you to embrace this part of your body that is painful. I will smile to this part of your body. We can always practice as a Sangha, and we can do it every day, before going to bed, or after you wake up. You should always look for a moment to do it, even if you have a doctor who is treating you, even if you take medicines. You should know that only nature can really establish health in your body. The animals resting in the forest have a strong trust in nature. It's because our bodies have the capacity to heal. When we cut a finger, what should we do to heal? It's enough to wash the wound, and let nature do the rest. Our mind knows how to heal itself, so we should allow our body to do the work. If healing is not happening, this is because we don't allow our body to heal, we have forbidden our body to heal, because we don't rest. That's how we prevent our body healing. It is very important to allow our body to heal itself. We should have trust in the capacity of our own body to heal. Practice the non-practice. Don't do anything—just allow your body to rest. With mindfulness and this rest, you can transform the state of your physical body. The Buddha has spoken at length about this practice. You should really love your body. You should

really take care of your body. Mindful breathing, with rest, can do miracles. While taking medicine, you can still help the healing with the practice of mindfulness of breathing and rest.

(Bell)

With the wellbeing and harmony that you have recovered, you will discover transformation in the realm of feelings and perceptions. We should always start with the body. Of course, there are wounds in our soul, in our consciousness. We should take care of that, but before anything, start to take care of your body.

I remember one time a journalist, a lady, came here to the New Hamlet to talk to our nuns. She wanted to write an article about Plum Village, and the sisters in Plum Village said, "If you want to write an article, you have to practice. If you would like to stay here for a week with us, then we will speak to you. If not, we won't." And she agreed--she stayed one week. This is what I do when I go to the United States: I always tell the journalists from the New York Times and the Washington Post, "You have to stay with us during the whole retreat in order to write something." And some of them agree. That's wonderful. This lady came here and stayed with the sisters and practiced for a week, and spoke with them. One day I came here, and she wanted to speak with me for fifteen minutes. She asked, "Thay, can you suggest some exercises for us?" and I offered this one. This journalist was from the magazine *Elle*, a women's magazine. The ladies are starting to be interested in Buddhism, and that's why *Elle* wanted to write something about meditation and Buddhism. So I started with, "If you are together with your husband in the living room, you can start practicing by turning to your husband, and saying, 'Darling, can I turn off the TV? I have something to tell you.' Of course, he will accept, unless it's the World Cup.

Did you read *The Little Prince* that St. Exupéry wrote? I think that Antoine de St. Exupéry wrote that to love is not to look at each other, but to look in the same direction. And in this case, the couple is looking at TV in the same direction, because it's no longer a pleasure to look at each other. In the beginning it was a pleasure, but now it's no longer a pleasure, it's kind of difficult to look at each other. I don't joy, I don't see freshness, happiness in you, that is why I don't have pleasure looking at you, and that's why I look in another direction, and you feel the same way. So you don't look at me, and you look at the TV with me. But of course it's not what Antoine de St. Exupéry wanted to say. I think that when we love each other we should look at each other, in order to be aware of whether the man or the woman we love is still alive. I told the children that to love is to recognize the presence of the one that you love. But in order to recognize this presence, you should be here, body and mind united. You should breathe mindfully, in order to bring back the mind to the body, in order to be really present in the here and the now. And if you are really here, you can recognize the other. To look at the other with mindfulness is to embrace that person in mindfulness. "Darling I know you are here, and I am very happy." Even if you don't say this, your look is enough. It proves that you are here for her or for him, and his or her presence gives you a lot of happiness. "Darling, I know you are here, and I am very happy."

When both of them are looking at the TV, that is because they don't feel happiness in looking at each other. So we have to start the practice, and the suggestion is given to her because *Elle* is a women's magazine. "You should start"—this is addressed to the lady—"by looking at him and by asking a question. You could ask: 'Darling, are we a really happy couple? We have to look clearly at the real situation. Darling, as a couple, are we happy? If not, why not?' You've heard that Buddhist meditation is the practice of stopping; in this case to stop is to turn off the TV. We should not get carried away by events and get lost. We suffer, so we let ourselves be carried away by the events of daily life. We should practice stopping, turning off the television, looking at this person who has been living next to you for ten or fifteen years, and asking the real question, "Darling are we happy as a couple? Let us be honest. Let us look at the reality. We cannot let things be that way anymore. If we are not happy, why not?" After stopping comes deep looking. Deep looking is part of meditation. The first part is to stop, the second part is deep looking; stopping, *samatha* (Sanskrit), and deep looking, *vipashyana* (Sanskrit). The practice of stopping gives us a chance to look deeply into the heart of things. These two elements constitute the practice of Buddhist meditation: we have to learn how to stop and find calm and concentration again. With stopping, calm and concentration, we start to look deeply into what is here, our own situation.

"Maybe your husband will cooperate, and you will practice deep looking. Maybe he will refuse. You had a lot of courage. While starting the practice, you asked your husband to practice with you, to look deeply into the situation. But maybe he doesn't want to collaborate, because for him it's difficult, it's painful, so it's easier for him to forget about it and look at television. So we should prepare carefully in order for him to accept. You should use the sort of

language that will invite him to do that. This practice implies deep listening, and the use of the kind of language that is called loving speech. If you have studied the Five Mindfulness Trainings, you already know that this is the practice of the Fourth Mindfulness Training—deep listening. Listening with awareness and loving speech, in order to help your husband and take him into the practice of looking deeply, you have to use loving speech. The Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara is a person who is able to listen with a lot of compassion. Therapists, when they have this capacity of deep listening, they can help a lot of people. We need to be calm and to have a certain compassion in order to listen to the other. If you don't have the capacity to listen, the other will not cooperate with you. So maybe before asking this question, you need to practice for a few days: practice sitting meditation, walking meditation, mindful breathing, in order to be able to say things with loving speech. Even if someone says stupid things, if the

other person is blaming, judging, you should still listen with calm, in order for the other to continue. Learn to practice like the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, practice deep listening.

"You should feed and maintain living compassion in yourself, in order to be able to listen. If not, his speech will touch seeds of pain in yourself, and at this moment anger may come up in you, may rise in you, and it will be very difficult for you to continue to listen and to continue to speak. So you should start with a few days of practice. In Plum Village, we can learn these things, we can learn how to sit calmly, with a lot of patience, with compassion, and learn how to breathe in order to remain calm during the whole conversation. Those are basic conditions for the practice to become a success. If you have all this, then your husband will cooperate, and both of you will be able to sit and look into things, and see why they have become so difficult. We have a house, we have cars, we have jobs, we have money in the bank, so why are we not happy? We should look deeply.

"In Buddhism we speak of suffering as the First Truth, the first of the Four Noble Truths. Suffering is a Noble Truth because, if we have the courage to look deeply into the nature of pain, then we will find a way that will lead us to liberation. This is why suffering is considered a Noble Truth. If you look at television with him, it is in order to forget reality. Turn off the TV, and come back to the real situation, and look with courage into the suffering. The Buddha said that with everything that happens to you, if you can identify the kind of nourishment has created that pain, at that moment you are already on the way to liberation, because nothing can survive without nourishment. Pain is the same. Suffering needs nourishment in order to continue. You have fed your pain, your suffering, you have lived in such a way that pain and suffering are possible. You have to look at why and how this pain is present. The Buddha speaks in terms of the four kinds of nourishment, and we have already talked about this last week. Sister Annabel has given a detailed talk on these four kinds of nourishment, and you can listen to the cassette.

"Of course, we have lived without mindfulness. We have made mistakes, we have created suffering in each other. We have sown suffering, pain, sorrow, anger and things like that in each other's consciousness. Now it is true that when we look at each other, we don't have joy and happiness any more. That is why we look at TV together. If you are seated with your husband in your living room, and if both of you are honest and trying to make an effort to recognize the causes of your difficulties, then you will see the path which leads you to well being and reconciliation. If the relationship between you and your husband is not good, if the communication between you has become impossible, that is because of mistakes in the past, and now the practice is to restore this communication which is so important. Re-establishing communication is an absolutely necessary practice. With the practice of deep listening, with the use of loving speech, we can always re-open the door that has been closed. You cannot open the door of his heart, and he cannot open the door of your heart. Communication has become impossible, so we have to do something to restore that communication.

"Nowadays, there are ways to communicate which are very sophisticated: we have e-mail, faxes, telephones, and satellites. We need only a few seconds to get in contact with people who live very far from here, but true communication has become very difficult. The practice of communication is a practice for everyone, in the family, in society, and in international community, even within ourselves. Communication has become difficult, because between you and yourself there is a lack of communication. Maybe communication has become impossible between you and your body, between you and your feelings, between you and your perceptions.

"Each one of us is made up of elements called *skandhas*. First, we have the physical body, which is called form, then the feelings, then the perceptions, and then the mental formations, and last, deep consciousness. These five elements, the five skandhas, form our territory. This territory is very large, immense. If each one of us is a king or a queen, ruling over this territory, but we are not very responsible kings or queens, there are things happening in this territory that we cannot control. There are conflicts, there is war in our territory. You cannot survey your territory, you do not have the capacity to allow peace and harmony to be in your territory—that's why you have a tendency to go away. When you look at television, this is an escape. You take refuge in the TV in order to forget yourself. If you are a responsible king or a responsible queen, you can go back to your territory in order to re-establish harmony and peace, but this is something you don't want to do. You look for an escape. Escaping your territory—in our society, this is how most people behave. We are afraid to go back. We always try to escape, and that is why things become worse every day.

"The Buddha suggests that we have to go back, that we should use mindfulness in order to come back to ourselves. Of course, there are too many pains in us, and we don't want to go back to these pains. But the Buddha said that with the practice of mindfulness you will have enough courage and energy to go back to yourself, and re-establish things the proper way. You have to go back to your physical body, embrace your physical body, to take care of the physical body. You should go back to your feelings, your emotions, even if these feelings are very unpleasant, even if it seems that they may destroy you, you should go back to them in order to embrace them, in order to help them to transform. If you are still afraid, you should call your Dharma brothers and sisters, and ask them for support, because practice can also happen in groups. As with deep relaxation, we can practice as a Sangha. One friend, one brother, one sister, can sit with you, and they can give you mindfulness energy so that you can go back home with strength. 'My brother, I know that the pain in you is very deep, and I am here for you.' Now, let us practice deep breathing. Let us calm our bodies, and let us try to breathe deeply in mindfulness and embrace the pain that you have

in yourself. So your Dharma brother or sister will sit next to you and practice with you and give you a lot of energy. A mother can help her son or daughter to practice this. The husband can help his wife to practice; the wife can help her husband to do the same thing. There is solidarity between the members of a Sangha, and meditation is individual, but it is also a group practice.

"If you think that by yourself you cannot go back, and you cannot embrace feelings or emotions, you can ask one, two, or three brothers to sit next to you and to help you with their support. This is always possible. To live as a Sangha is very good, because you can always benefit from the collective energy of your Sangha, in order to be able to go back to yourself and embrace the suffering in yourself, the fear, the anxiety, the despair. We have to call these things by their names, but you can do this only if you already have a little bit of this energy that we call mindfulness. By practicing walking meditation, by practicing mindfulness of breathing, taking your meal in mindfulness, you cultivate this kind of energy, and with this energy you are able to come back and embrace the block of sufferings that is in you. We are here, brothers and sisters in the Dharma, to support you in your practice. If everyone in the family knows the practice, then the situation is going to be able to transform very quickly.

(bell)

"In exactly the same way that you embrace your physical body, you will say, 'Darling, I am here for you,' in the realm of feelings. 'My suffering, my despair, I know you are here. I am here for you.' You recognize the presence of your suffering, of your despair, and with this energy of mindfulness, you take into your arms this block of suffering. This is the practice. If you have the support of brothers and sisters around you, then this practice of transforming pain will be a success. Keep mindful breathing alive, and continue for ten or twenty minutes.

"This energy of mindfulness—what is it? It is the capacity to be here, to be really present, really alive, with body and mind unified in harmony. Each one of us has a seed of mindfulness in himself or herself. Among us there are people who have a big seed of mindfulness; it is enough to touch it, and it will manifest right away. You can use this energy to embrace your own pain. For this energy to be abundant enough, you have to live in mindfulness, drink in mindfulness, eat in mindfulness, walk in mindfulness, speak in mindfulness, and breathe in mindfulness. When you hold in your hand a glass of water, you can become aware that you are holding a glass of water in your hand. When you drink, you are drinking with mindfulness. "I drink water, and I know I am drinking water." This is mindfulness. When you walk, you know that you walk. With mindfulness while walking, while drinking...in that way you generate the energy of mindfulness.

"You know that energy of mindfulness is the energy of the Buddha. Everyone has the possibility of drinking in mindfulness, eating in mindfulness, breathing in mindfulness. Brothers and sisters in the Dharma around us are practicing this, and the practice becomes something natural, easy. Benefit from the Sangha in order to progress in your practice of mindfulness. You can develop the seed of mindfulness that is already in yourself. The Buddha is somebody who has a lot of this energy. He is always present, he knows what is going on in the present moment, and he can embrace everything, and transform everything. This mindfulness is available in you. It is the Buddha present in you, it is something really concrete; the energy of mindfulness is not something abstract. When you can touch the Buddha in yourself, you are able to touch peace, tranquility, and the possibility of love and peace manifesting in yourself. Based on my experience, only a few days of practice can already give you enough energy of mindfulness so that you can embrace your suffering, your despair, your depression. If you have around you brothers and sisters who practice the same thing, then the practice will be much easier. You know that they are here to support you, and you will have more courage, and more confidence, and the practice will bring fruit in a few days. With my own eyes I have seen the transformation of people who suffered a lot, I have seen the reconciliations between partners in a number of couples who have come to practice. Each one of us has the power to heal and to transform, and I will repeat this again: it's this energy of mindfulness that will repair everything, that will help you to transform and to heal.

I think that during the Dharma sharings we should talk about how to practice these teachings, how to generate energy of mindfulness, how to go back to ourselves and embrace our physical bodies and our emotions, because this is the key to success.

End of Dharma talk

Source : <http://www.plumvillage.org>

